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ABSTRACT

Originally prepared for the opening address of a seminar on child abuse and neglect held in Sydney on September 24, 1980, the aim of this discussion paper is to give a very brief picture of the conditions and life patterns of children from the Middle Ages into the twentieth century. The focus of the historical review is mainly on British children because Australia was settled as a British colony and many Australian traditions stem from colonial days. A brief "catalogue of disaster" reflecting the harsh social conditions under which families in general and children in particular had to suffer is presented in order to emphasize that it becomes very hard to draw the line between ideas of abuse and neglect in the present and normal treatment in the past. Emphasis is also given to the fact that in the past different treatment received by children was based on underlying, opposing views of the nature of a new baby. Attention is given to the historical development of articles of legislation protecting British children. Concluding paragraphs discuss the social conditions of childhood in Australia and indicate some of the problems of childhood (such as violence against children and unscrupulous advertising) in the context of the so-called child-centered twentieth century. (Author/RH)

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The Changing Face of Childhood

This paper was prepared for the opening address delivered by Dr. Edgar at the **Seminar on Child Neglect and Abuse** held in Sydney by the NSW Department of Community Welfare, on 24 September, 1980.

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Introduction

I want to stress in this talk the social context of parenthood. In conferences such as this on child abuse and neglect, people often tend to forget that it is not simply a problem of parent/child relationships. Childhood is of course part of a changing social setting and the treatment of children reflects prevailing social attitudes.

What we face now in Australian society, as in most of the western world, is an increase in affluence associated with an increasing privatisation of family life, an increasing trend toward, if you like, a selfish exploration of relationships inside marriage and an increasing tendency to forget that marriage and the family and childhood are produced by the society.

In the Institute of Family Studies we are trying to make sure that in all of our discussions, our research and our analysis of what is happening to the Australian family, we look at changes in the social setting, that we look at the economic context, the social context, and the psychological context in which families operate. I urge you in this conference to consider the nature of the family itself, within the context of a changing, increasingly affluent, increasingly divided, increasingly different, and increasingly privatised society. The problem of child neglect is of course not new but we have a new awareness of children and their needs which I think needs to be highlighted and which perhaps gives some cause for optimism when we face the next 20 years of this century.

I want to step back a little and give you a brief picture of childhood from the Middle Ages to the present. Those of you who are historians will forgive the brevity of this outline but I want to highlight a number of aspects of childhood and to suggest that the image of children has changed quite significantly and in a positive direction.

Images of Childhood

It is easy to assume that children have always been subject to parental love and consideration, and on the whole treated well throughout the course of history. If we stop to think about it though, discipline appeared to be stricter in our parents time than it is now, and children did not have as many clothes, toys and outings as most children have today. Some readers may have parents who lived through 'The Depression' of the 1930s and know from them that food was short and conditions generally hard for many families and children, but that is often as far as our knowledge goes. Those who have read the Charles Dicken's novels, ***Oliver Twist*** and the ***Christmas Carol,*** will have some idea of the difficult and pitiful circumstances of some children in nineteenth century England. But, most of us know only isolated snippets of what it was like to be a child in past times.

The aim of this paper is to give a very brief picture of the conditions and life patterns of children from the Middle Ages until the twentieth century. In doing so, it is hoped to illustrate that parent-child relationships are not simply 'natural' and unchanging but are affected by differences in economic and social conditions as well as prevailing ideas about the nature of children. The focus will mainly be on British children because Australia was settled as a British colony and many of our traditions have stemmed from this.

Images of childhood have changed over time and will continue to change. Throughout this paper a collage of child images appears; the 'small adult' of the Middle Ages, the 'sinful child' of the Calvanists, the 'naturally good and innocent child' of the Humanists and Rousseau, the child 'moulded by the environment and sensory experience' of John Locke, the 'conditioned' child of the behaviourists and the 'sexual child' of the Freudians.

As images of children change, so do child-rearing practices and education. Several images of children may co-exist leading to competing theories in regard to the upbringing of children, some of which may be complimentary while others are mutually exclusive. For instance, those who believe children can be conditioned into acceptable behaviour and attitudes will keep to a rigid system of rules to train the child correctly, while those who believe that the child is naturally good but corrupted by society will take pains to provide a suitable environment. However, images of childhood are mostly implicit in the behaviour and beliefs of parents and educators rather than explicit, although sometimes they are apparent in the art of a period. The 'innocent' child image often appears in paintings or even small angels on the gravestones of young children.

Philippe Ariès, a pioneer in the history of children, argues that the idea of childhood did not exist in the Middle Ages (Ariès, 1962). However, in saying this he is not implying a lack of affection or neglect of offspring, rather the lack of a concept for a particular stage of the life cycle. The bond between parent and child was less centred on affection than the contribution the child could make to household tasks. Infants hardly counted in the family as their survival was so precarious because of high rate of death from disease.

Children and adults mixed together on all occasions for work, relaxation or sport. This can be seen in the art of the period. Fairy stories, nursery rhymes and games were for both adults and children (Tucker, 1974, Pinchbeck and Hewitt, 1973). Children wore the same clothes as adults and once they became capable of independence joined the adult world of work.

English families of all classes at this time kept their children at home until they were between 7 and 9 years of age, when they went to live with another family in a form of apprenticeship. These days we would

think that children of this age were too young to leave home and go to work. Our thinking would be more in keeping with an Italian visitor to England during this period, who wrote an account of the practice, and described the English as cruel to their children. In fact sending the children to another household was a form of education suited to a time when knowledge and expertise were generally passed on from one generation to the next by the participation of children in everyday adult life. This occurred in trade, craft, court etiquette, the army, and to people in all walks of life. Obviously, some children would have fared better in their master's house than others (Ariès, 1962, 365–375). It must be remembered that at this time, community life was more important than family life, and the family was very much part of the total community.

The treatment of children as adults at such a young age is in marked contrast to our current ideas about children. Families now keep children at home and dependent until at least 15 years of age – the minimum school leaving age. Although there is still an apprenticehsip system for some trades, it begins only after many years of formal education within the school system and training for any job or profession is usually done by 'experts' in an educational setting.

Family life nowadays is considered private, and individuals, much concerned with their personal welfare and rights, are often isolated and out of touch with the local community. The development of the notion of childhood as an important, even crucial stage in the human lifecycle, occurred in conjunction with these changes in the family;

The period between the Middle Ages and the twentieth century was marked by major changes in society. The first major change which affected the poor country labourer was the enclosure of common land which took away his right to graze a few animals and supplement his meagre wages. Of greater significance, but related to enclosure, was the Industrial Revolution and the consequent separation of work from home and the increasingly complex division of labour. These changes underly the shift from the family tightly interwoven into the community in the Middle Ages, to today's concept of the family as a private haven for the individual cut off from interference by the community, but also very often isolated from the support of community interaction (Shorter 1976, Thompson 1874, Best 1973).

Until late in the nineteenth century, life was precarious for young and old, rich and poor, in a way which is not experienced in the twentieth century. Edward Shorter provides us with a record of the births and deaths in an ordinary German family in the eighteenth century, which was typical of many European families of the period. Johann Michael Frank, a baker, in 1892 married a woman whose first husband had died. They had five children, all of whom died, except the youngest who survived to maturity. The mother died when the youngest child was five years old. The father

remarried, once again to a woman who had lost one husband. Such a loss these days would almost certainly be emotionally crippling for the remnants of the family, but it was not unusual for the times (Shorter, 1976, 199).

High rates of infant and maternal mortality existed during the Middle Ages and this continued until well into the nineteenth century. Much of this was due to disease, poor nutrition , lack of hygiene and lack of medical knowledge. Doctors could not be present at a birth; but for the wealthy, astrologers were allowed to witness the birth and declare the fate of the child. The image of infants that emerges from descriptions of childbirth and baby care in the Middle Ages is faceless and purely biological. Infants were born with but a slim chance of survival. Parents had many children in the hope that some would live (Aries, 1962).

Births were handled by midwives who were both respected and subject to superstitious fears. During the seventeenth century they were licenced by the church for two reasons. Firstly, to ensure the child was baptised if it was dead or dying, and secondly, to prevent the midwife practising witchcraft. The oath taken by the midwife gives some indication of the reasons for fear – 'I will not destroy the child of any woman, nor cut, nor pull the head there off, or otherwise dismember or hurt the same, or suffer it to be so hurt or dismembered'. Doctors were called only in the case of trouble and arrived with terrifying instruments. A hooked knife and an instrument called a 'crochet' which was similar to a large crochet hook were used for delivering dead babies. It would be hard in those days to look forward joyfully to the birth of a child (Illick, 1974, 304–307). Because many babies died at birth and in the first years of life, infant deaths were not recorded on headstones before the end of the seventeenth century. The uniqueness of each child was not recognised and babies were often given the name of a sibling who had died. This practice continued until the late eighteenth century (Stone, 1979, 257).

The babies who survived the dangers of birth did not necessarily live happily ever after. At birth the baby was cleaned and swaddled. Swaddling meant encasing the simply clad baby in broad bands of cloth, which were wound tightly round its body down to its feet. The baby's arms were pinned to its sides until it resembled a cocoon. Swaddling had to be removed to change the baby; often it was left to stagnate in its own excrement (Shorter, 1976, 196–198).

It was thought that swaddling made the child's limbs grow straight. But whatever the said reason, in some ways it made it easier for those caring for babies to manage. Swaddling was more likely with children of the well off than children of the poor or farming families who were left unbound; John Locke argued that children should be left free to move. His notion was of the child as ***tabula rasa***, meaning that exploration and experience could make the child 'perfectible' (Illick, 1974).

Many babies were wet-nursed in the home if the parents could afford it. Wet-nursing was a source of income for poor women. But many babies died while being wet-nursed. In the London Bills of Mortality, between 1639 and 1659, the stated cause of death for 529 babies was 'overlaid and starved at nurse' (Illick, 1974, 308–310). In France, where the practice of wet-nursing was more widespread than in England, historical evidence suggests that many babies were placed in appalling conditions in putrid hovels with several other babies and one wet-nurse. The parents rarely visited their infants which they had placed through agencies. Nurses often fed their own babies first and gave the others inferior food substitutes. Consequently, many babies died in the unfavourable conditions (Shorter, 1979). Wet nurses would hang the baby in its swaddling from a nail on the wall if busy. This constricted the baby's circulation and breathing and in some cases killed it. The dead baby was sometimes replaced with a village child without the parents realising (Shorter, 1979, 308).

Evidence of infanticide abounds during the period we are looking at. Essex Court records for the fifteenth and sixteenth century give many examples of infanticide where charges were actually made. According to the records, babies had their throats cut, were strangled, left to die of cold, smothered, drowned and so on. But some deaths would have occurred which went unrecorded (Tucker, 1974, 24). Many of these children were illegitimate and all were certainly unwanted. Illegitimate children were frequently abandoned in both England and France. Many were simply left in the streets to die or be looked after by some charitable person or institution. From 1722 onwards, most abandoned English babies were sent to parish work-houses where the death rate was almost as high as if they had been left on the streets.

> "For the few who survived (in workhouses), the prospect was a grim one. The older females were frequently handed over to master who is either vicious or cruel: in the one case they fall victim to his irregular passions; and in the other are subjected with unreasonable severity, to tasks too hard to be performed. These were the lucky ones, others being virtually enslaved by criminals and trained for a life of prostitution if female or robbery and pick-pocketing if male.
>
> Some had their teeth torn out to serve as artificial teeth for the rich; others were deliberately maimed by beggars to arouse compassion and extract alms. Even this latter crime was one upon which the law looked with a remarkably tolerant eye. In 1761 a beggar woman, convicted of deliberately 'putting out the eyes of children with whom she went about the country' in order to attract pity and alms, was sentenced to no more than 2 years imprisonment" (Stone. 1979, 296–398).

This catalogue of disaster is not presented for the simple reason of shocking you. It is there to stress the ***social*** conditions under which people, families in general and particularly children had to suffer. Conditions were harsh

for the adult poor and consequently they were harsh for the children. Children were left alone and neglected while the mother worked. Child mortality was exceptionally high in areas where female employment was high and the demand for child labour low, because the children were left at home during the day and neglected. Sometimes they were dosed with opiates to keep them quiet and they often went hungry. If the mother did not work because she had too many surviving children, the family suffered from hunger and deprivation (Stone, 1979, 296). Notice that the social attitudes at this time portray the child as evil, an image purveyed, among others, by John Wesley.

Discipline was severe and children were whipped by parents, or by masters if they were apprenticed. It was an expected part of the upbringing of children in the sixteenth and seventeenth century and later. Punishment was physical rather than pyschological and children were expected to be totally subordinate to parents. At times there were examples of parents of all classes who went too far with their punishment and damaged or killed the child.

In 1674 a man near Wakefield hanged his own child for taking a piece of bread to eat (Stone, 1979, 295–298). Lady Abergavenny 'in a passion killed her own child about seven years old. She having been a great while whipping it, my lord being grieved to hear it cry so terribly, went into the room to plead for it, and she threw it with such force on the ground she broke the skull; the girl lived but four hours after it' (Stone, 1979, 12-–123).

In much of the description of child rearing practices and discipline, it becomes very hard to draw the line between what we would presently regard as child abuse and neglect, and what would be normal treatment of the child in the generally harsh circumstances of the time. It is made even harder when the often appalling circumstances in which many of the parents existed are taken into account.

It should be stressed that it was not simply the poor or the working class who maltreated their children. The children of the well-off did not escape from harsh treatment. Boys who were sent away to school were often subject to severe flogging and discipline which bordered on the sado-masochistic. During the eighteenth century, because girls were competing to make a good 'match' when they married, they were subject to many physical restraints in order to develop looks that were fashionable at the period. To this end girls wore tight stays, ate little and had little exercise and in some cases wore iron collars and back braces all for what we would consider the doubtful achievement of rigid upright posture, an emaciated body, pallid complexion, languid airs and the ability to faint with little provocation. William Law who wrote a handbook on child-rearing in the eighteenth century pointed out the way in which girls were physically injured by these practices. He told the story of a girl who died at twenty. An autopsy found that 'her ribs had grown into her liver, and that her

other entrails were much hurt by being crushed together with her stays, which her mother had ordered to be twitched so tight that it often brought tears to her eyes whilst the maid was dressing her' (Stone, 1979, 278–282).

This all paints a gloomy picture of childhood. But some children were well treated by parents who could afford the time, effort and money. Thomas More, the humanist scholar, educated his daughters at home and was a loving and gentle father. If they were naughty he was so loathe to harm them that he used a peacock feather to whip them. But on the whole the prevailing doctrine was 'spare the rod and spoil the child' (Stone 1979, Robertson, 1974). Underlying the differing treatment of children were ***opposing views of the nature of a new baby.*** Humanists such as More believed that the baby is born innocent and corrupted by society. This Utopian image of children was largely swept aside by the Calvinist view that children are born in original sin, an idea which, whilst not new, was taken up with fervent vigor. Rousseau and others revived the theory of the innocence of children in the early nineteenth century, but adherents tended to be an educated minority.

The Calvinist view of the innate depravity of children led to very stern and unremitting efforts by parents to break the child's will and thus control its sinful impulses. John Wesley's mother, Susanna, is an example of the practical implications of this view, in the early eighteenth century. Her ideas were passed on to her son and the Wesleyan movement. In describing the upbringing of young children she said 'when turned a year old, and some before, they were taught to fear the rod and cry softly, by which means they escaped the abundance of correction they might otherwise have had, and that most odious noise of the crying of children was rarely heard in the house'. Children were taught to be absolutely obedient to parents and God (Stone, 1979, 292–294).

'Today the rights of the child – to adequate food, clothing, medical care, to appropriate education and relevant training, protection against exploitation, cruelty and neglect, against exposure to any kind of moral or physical danger or unnecessary suffering of any kind – are recognised and safeguarded by statute' (Pinchbeck, 1973, 347). But during the centuries described so far, this was not so. It was not until the late eighteenth century and throughout the nineteenth century that there was gradual introduction of laws designed to control the exploitation and injury of children, and eventually, laws to promote their well-being. Before this children were the property of their father, just as their mother was, for good or evil. (The United Nations Declaration now mentions only the mother, as though she were the only parent).

The State also treated children harshly with no concessions to their inevitable immaturity. Children were regarded as adult at seven and therefore responsible for their actions. Until 1780 over two hundred offences were punishable by hanging, and many children 'like the little

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by Gay Ochiltree & Don Edgar

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girl of seven (who was) hanged in the market place at Norwich for stealing a petticoat, (or) on one day alone, in February 1814, at the Old Bailey sessions, five children were condemned to death; Fowler, aged twelve and Wolfe aged twelve, for burglary in a dwelling; Morris, aged eight, Solomons, aged nine, and Burrell, aged eleven, for burglary and stealing a pair of shoes' (Pinchbeck, 1973, 351–352). Many other children were sentenced to transportation to Australia for what would nowadays be regarded as trivial offences, such as stealing handkerchiefs or a shawl.

Ironically in 1814, legislation was passed to prevent kidnapping. Prior to this, a child could be stolen, but not his shoes; conviction could be gained for stealing the clothes only, ***not*** for ***stealing*** the child (Pinchbeck, 1973, 360).

During the latter part of the eighteenth century and early part of the nineteenth century, increasing industrialisation and the concomitant shift population to the cities caused major social changes in English society. Those most negatively affected were the poor labouring classes and workers in cottage industries which were outmoded and made uneconomic by industry (Thompson 1974, 352–358). Whole families worked long hours in factories and mines in conditions which were often dangerous and physically debilitating. Some industries were worse than others. In the mines children called 'trappers' operated the doors for coal tubs to pass through and women and children hauled the tubs. Wages, which were low, varied according to sex, age, and job, and were based on the family as the unit of earning, rather than the individual. The developing factory system with increasing division of labour by sex and age left no room for the traditional family work relationships which had existed even in the early days of the cotton industry (Harrison, 1973).

Improvements in machinery, such as the power looms, changed work conditions and caused agitation for shorter hours for children. This led to the ***Factory Act*** of 1833 which limited children's labour to eight hours a day. Adults continued to work much longer hours assisted by changing shifts of children. But this difference in hours worked, broke up the family even further, and caused operatives to demand an eight hour day for all. This was unacceptable and eventually a compromise of a universal 10 hour day – which meant an increase of hours for children – was the outcome (Harrison, 1973, 102–105).

Although Lord Shaftesbury and other reformers worked to get the still appalling situation of many children improved, they were working in a community where parents and the general populace had become hardened and in some cases indifferent to the suffering and exploitation of children from a lifetime of experience and familiarity with it. Further obstacles included the common belief supported by religion, that there was a place in society for everyone, and everyone should remain in his place. The epitome of this view was the theory developed by the Reverend Thomas

Malthus in 1798 when he wrote ***An Essay on the Principle of Population.*** In Malthus' view '. . . all unwholesome occupations, severe labour and exposure to the seasons, extreme poverty, bad nursing of children, large towns, excesses of all kinds, the whole train of common diseases and epidemics, wars, plague and famine' were natural checks against a population which tends to grow larger than the means of subsistence. The only alternative to this, according to Malthus, was postponement of marriage and thus prevention of population increase, until the man could afford to support a family (Harrison, 1973, 28--30). Malthus' book was so popular that six editions were published.

Factory inspectors in the 1860s were still finding numerous instances of ghastly industrial accidents and diseases. Many children were quietly being murdered in the cause of production. Up to 2,000 boys were still employed as chimney sweeps, although Jonas Hanway a century before in 1773, had publicised the terrible life and conditions of these climbing boys, who sometimes suffocated in chimneys and had fires lit under them if they were reluctant to climb. Charles Kingsley wrote ***The Waterbabies*** in the 1860s in response to the situation, and in 1873 Lord Shaftesbury succeeded in having an Act passed prohibiting the use of climbing boys to clean chimneys. The Children's Employment Commission of the middle 1860s investigating the conditions of working children came to the conclusion that children of both sexes required more protection ***from their parents*** than from anyone else. By the end of that decade many of the problems in regard to child labour came to an end with the passing of an ***Education Act,*** accepting the principle that all children under ten should attend school full time. However, Geoffrey Best comments that 'it seems unlikely that heightened sympathy was the main cause of this change of mind. More probable were, first, prosaic factors of technological progress, making use of cheap infant and female workers increasingly uneconomical and avoidable' (Best, 1971, 129--135).

Unscrupulous child minders in the nineteenth century were known as baby farmers. In many instances the babies were neglected and in some cases drugged with laudanum. Many babies died as a result of this. In 1870 in London, the bodies of 276 babies were found in various places. The case of Margaret Waters who was convicted of the murder of a number of babies was given a great deal of publicity, which helped gain support for the Infant Life Protection Society in 1870. In 1872 the ***Infant Life Protection Act*** was passed requiring people who minded more than two children for remuneration to register their homes with local authorities, and that they should be certain of the good character of the person. The Act also required that the death of an infant in such circumstances must be registered and a death certificate from a doctor provided. The Act was easily evaded at first but was later amended (Pinchbeck, 1973, 611).

It was 1889, however, before an Act was passed for the Prevention of Cruelty to, and Better Protection of Children, (Children's Charter). This

Act was long in coming about because of the fear of invading the privacy of the family. It must be pointed out that an Act preventing cruelty to ***animals*** was passed 75 years before. In the five years following the passing of this Act, 5,792 persons were prosecuted for cruelty, of whom 5,460 were convicted, and 47,000 complaints were investigated. The Act was then broadened to include cruelty to boys up to 16 years. Some instances of the types of cruelty for which convictions were gained are as follows: –

> 'Punishing a child by putting pins into its nostrils; putting lighted matches up them; biting a child's wrist till a wound was made, and then burning the wound with lighted matches; burning the hands of a boy of six with matches; biting them till they bled, the limbs of a seven months old baby; forcing the bone ring of a feeding bottle up and down the throat of a three months old baby till it bled; throwing a little girl of two years, ill of bronchitis, out of its bedroom window, breaking its bones and ending its life; . . . leaving a baby unlifted out of its cradle for weeks, till toadstools grew around the child out of its own rottenness; . . . keeping the stumps of little amputated legs sore, to have the child with its little face puckered up in pain, to excite pity; tying a rope round a boy of six, dipping him in the canal, leaving him immersed till exhausted, bringing him up, recovering him; . . . keeping a child always in a cool cellar till its flesh became green . . .' (Pinchbeck, 1973, 628).

Cases were not confined to the poor. In 1892 a lady of good position was sentenced to one year's goal for tying up her little girl and locking her in a cupboard for five hours as a result of which the child died (Pinchbeck, 1973, 627–632).

Other laws were passed which affected the wellbeing of children. Firstly, in 1889, the ***Poor Law Adoption Act*** deprived irresponsible parents of their children and transferred them to overseers to ensure their welfare. In 1891 a further Act, ***The Custody of Children Act,*** prevented parents who had abandoned or neglected their children from reclaiming them later when they were old enough to earn money (Pinchbeck, 1973, 363). By this time there was more widespread community concern about the welfare and health of all children and the standard of living had generally improved.

Australian Children

The situation of children in Australia has always been a little different from that of children in England. Settlement of Australia began in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century with convicts transported from England for a wide variety of crimes, many of which seem trivial to us now. Amongst these convicts were children over seven years of age who were transported for their crimes – as mentioned earlier – and the children of female convicts. Two-thirds of all children in the early 1800s were illegitimate. The young convict boys of 13 or 14 years and over were treated as the adults, their tasks and rations were the same, as was the discipline.

'William Gates, the Canadian exile, describes the severe flogging on the back of a thirteen-year-old for absconding. He received 36 lashes from a well-built six foot man: 'It seemed somehow inhuman that a man of this size, a giant almost, should fasten upon the triangle a little boy . . . a perfect Lilliputian'. The boy's attempted bravado, which did not survive the first stroke, provoked his flagellator, allegedly contrary to his intention, into using his full strength because the lad was 'so sassy'. Cruelty in the convict era was not confined to the ruling classes'. (Gandevia, 1978, 47).

Although there is evidence that child health improved in the early years of Australian settlement because the classical infectious diseases failed to survive the long sea voyage, childhood was still hazardous. Children were lost in the bush, killed and injured by animals – one child was eaten by his pet pig, occasionally they were drowned or killed or injured by natives. Epidemic diseases appeared and wreaked havoc on both children and adults, however, in Australia digestive disorders were the main killers (Gandevia, 1978, Burns & Goodnow, 1979).

Convict boys who were transported to Australia were extremely short, even stunted, compared to more favoured classes in England. But, fifty years later even underprivileged Australian youths were approximately 13cm taller than their earlier counterparts, and often children were as tall as their parents by puberty. Unfortunately, many of these 'fine children' were abondoned, and there were many orphans. Governor King, distressed by the large number of abandoned children, established an orphanage for their support to prevent them developing the vices of their negligent parents and fellow citizens.

The first institution housed 100 girls, and within three years, community leaders were calling for institutions for boys as well. Governor Macquarie established an orphanage for boys, beginning with 80 boys who were taught the 3 Rs and the elements of trades. These early orphan schools were successful in developing a new generation notable for its good behaviour and respected in the community (Gandevia, 1978).

From the early days of settlement more young children, although poor, received an education than their English counterparts where child labour was valuable. In the Female Factories, which were set up to provide care for pregnant unmarried females before and after birth, nursery schools were provided for children over one year old. Schools were founded whenever a teacher of sorts could be found. Churches also began setting up schools which were aided by the State (Gandevia, 1978).

The gold rushes in the middle of the nineteenth century and associated socio-economic stress for some families, resulted again in many neglected and abandoned children. Industrial schools were set up for those under 12 years, and those over 12 could be apprenticed on government authority. But there were worries about the psychological effects of institutional life

on the children, and they certainly were not the success the early orphanages were, partly due to different and more favourable conditions existing in the community than had existed in the early days of settlement.

Another problem of the times was infanticide which, as already indicated, was a common problem in England. A Melbourne medical journal in 1863 was concerned that 25 per cent of inquests on children who died under three years of age indicated death was due to neglect, ignorance and maltreatment. One of the reasons for the high rate of infanticide was social and economic pressure on unmarried mothers. Homes were opened in Melbourne and Sydney for foundlings and destitute infants. In spite of this assistance, infanticide remained a problem.

> 'In the 1890s extreme instances of baby-farming were brought to light. In Sydney in 1892, Mr and Mrs Makin were found to have buried a number of babies in the gardens of several houses which they had occupied. Their technique was to advertise under various names, representing themselves as fond parents anxious to give affection to some unwanted baby. Their activities were revealed because some of the mothers became too persistent in wanting to see their infants. An unqualified midwife at Lane Cove, also a professional baby-farmer, certified that she delivered a woman of a premature male child, on which statement the child was buried as 'still-born', although it was in fact two months old. In Melbourne in 1894 Frances Knorr was hanged for killing one child; she confessed to killing two and was suspected of disposing of a dozen. These cases precipitated legislation in New South Wales and Victoria – indeed, in all States, to register and inspect all foster homes, to supervise all young children placed in foster care by parents or relations and to improve the system of medical certification of infant deaths' (Gandevia, 1978, 104).

Aboriginal children, along with their parents, have suffered at the hands of whites since settlement of Australia. The tribal way of life was broken up as their land was taken over, and European diseases decimated tribes. White-man's food further wrecked their health as it broke down their traditional diet (Franklin, 1976). Only recently has the aboriginal birthrate begun rising again after many years of decline. But, it is well known that the mortality rate for aboriginal babies is far greater than that of whites. In the Northern Territory for 1979 there were 45 aboriginal infant deaths per 1000 live births, whereas in the white population of Northern Territory there were 9.8 deaths per 1000 live births (Department of Health, N.T. 1979).

The twentieth century is known as the century of the child. Children in Western society are better off in many ways than they have ever been. This is in part because the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century was a time of increasing interest in empirical research into the stages of child development. The reasons for this are complex, but related in part to the fact that children were no longer needed in production and the belief

that science would lead to progress in all spheres of life, as it had in industry.

But we ought to look very closely to our own laurels before passing motions of self-congratulations. For we have a social context which condones violence; we have a social context in which the motor car can kill anybody almost with impunity; we have a social context in which violence may be shown, in virtually any form on the media, where the role models is provided for children suggest the solution to problems (and in particular, solving personal/inter personal problems) is to hit. Are we really any better than people in the nineteenth century? I think we are but I think we need to look very closely at the sort of context in which we are discussing child neglect and abuse. A narrow minded model of parent/child relationships will not suffice. Nor will a narrow medical model suffice. You cannot treat child neglect and abuse within the context of medical treatment. It is not simply a matter of physically bashing or injuring a child. It is much wider than that. It is a question of psychological abuse, it is a question of the society itself tolerating treatment of children which is just as horrific as those horrible examples dwelt upon through the body of this talk.

Freud's psycho-analytic theory early this century, brought forth a new image of 'the sexual child', at a time when children were thought to have no sexual feelings. But even more important for parents in this century was his emphasis on the importance of early experience for the future character of the child. Freud also developed the idea of the role of the unconscious to explain irrational acts, thus undermining the traditional attitude of child culpability (Cleverley, 1976, Skolnick, 1978). Freud's ideas have been widely disseminated and incorporated into many theories of human development and behaviour and hence into child care manuals, thus having a profound influence on the upbringing of children in the mid to late twentieth century[1]. That influence has, in my view, been harmful because it places blame on parents in isolation from the social context in which they live.

The behaviourists, J.B. Watson and B.F. Skinner, have also had a major influence on child rearing with their scientific theories of conditioning. Watson denied the influence of heredity, emphasising instead the importance of experience. He placed great responsibility for the child's behaviour on the mother, who must give sole attention to the child in the first two years. The future of 'the conditioned child' of Skinner and Watson was determined by environment and training for which parents were responsible. Once again the parent's role was seen as crucial in determining the end product and the child played a passive, responding role (Cleverly, 1976, Skolnick, 1978).

1. Dr. Spock's ***Baby and Child Care*** sold over 10,000,000 copies and was based on psycho-analytic theory as well as research into childhood diseases and nutrition.

The pervasiveness of the above theories in child rearing literature has led many modern parents to feel anxiety and frequently guilt about their parenting capacity. Parents are blamed for all manner of aberrations in their children, with little account being taken of the child's part in events. The mother's role as naturally loving nurturer of baby and child has been taken for granted until recently. This idealogy has resulted in two myths – the myth of the naturally loving mother, and the myth of the vulnerable child. Skolnick argues that children do influence their upbringing by their behaviour and their own personal needs and qualities and that parent-child interaction is not a one way transaction. It is only now being realised that parenting is learned rather than natural behaviour.

In the smaller families and age segregated communities of contemporary society, individuals are less likely to gain experience in a parental role before they become parents themselves. They have few opportunities to care for infants and young children. Thus they seek 'expert' help which often sets high expectations of perfectibility which neither parent nor child can live up to. This leads to feelings of failure and inadequacy on the part of the parents.

We now have a paradoxical situation in the so-called child-centred twentieth century. Most children live in better housing, have better health, education and generally affluent circumstances than last century, yet we still have large numbers of children in Australia living in poverty – particularly children in single parent families. There has been great emphasis on good mothering but we have many children emotionally smothered by too much maternal attention and intrusion (Poster, 1978). We have more mothers of young children working, frequently of necessity, and unable to provide adequate child care. The prevailing myth that mothering is a joy which comes naturally with the birth of a baby, has meant that for a long time doctors and others failed to recognise the symptoms of child abuse because they did not expect parents would injure their children. Since the fifties and sixties, there has been increasing recognition of the problems of child abuse and neglect, and the suffering of the children involved. There is also increasing awareness of the plight of the parents involved (Burns and Goodnow, 1979). Only now are we admitting that it is not always easy to be a parent and that parents need support and sometimes relief from their tasks. There is still, however, great reluctance to interfere in the workings of the family, often with appalling consequences for all concerned.

Finally, we have the problem of the child as the target for unscrupulous advertising either directly or indirectly. Stuart Ewen in ***Advertising as a Way of Life*** argues that whereas once children worked in the household contributing to survival and production, childhood now is a period of

consumption of goods and services. Recognising this fact, advertising earlier in the century appealed to parents, on behalf of the young, to use their products for happier, healthier children. Ewen further argues that advertising symbolically promoted and idealised youth over age, making parents feel old and out of date and therefore unsure of themselves. Modern advertising, particularly on television, makes direct appeals to children to buy a range of goods from junk food to the latest toy, adding further pressures through the child to the family, in a way that did not exist earlier this century.

More effective contraception and better preventative medicine, hygiene and health care have brought us in the eighties to a time when couples can choose when and if they want children. Those who choose to have children can expect them to live to maturity, with few exceptions; quite unlike the situation in previous centuries when parents had many children in the hope that one or two would survive. The eighties should be the period of the 'wanted' child with best provisions made to support both parents and child. The time has come to promote problems associated with childhood as social issues rather than merely provide individual therapy for parents who experience difficulty and children who cannot conform. It is time to look once again for broader societal causes of childhood problems – such things as poverty, failure to provide adequate services, inappropriate education, poor housing etc., instead of placing all problems at the feet of the individual. It is time to start thinking of the 'socio-legal' child, the child with rights for whom parents act as 'guardians'. Though the point of parenting is to facilitate the child's growth to independence as a competent adult citizen, many parents fail to realize this. Children have to be allocated rights as they grow, so parents as a consequence have to release their hold. The child is held in trust and guardians who break that trust should not be parents. We need responsible parenting, but we also need a society which makes that possible for all. We have come a long way in our understanding of childhood. Yet neglect, abuse, denial of rights still exist. The challenge of the eighties is to see the 'wanted' child triumph over the 'exploited' child in our child-centred society.

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